Ella



a singing super star in the sky that just won't fall

Exclusive Representation: Salle Productions, Inc., 451 N. Canon Dr., Beverly Hills, Calif. / Personal Management: Norman Granz

Ella. And The Whole World Knows Who You Mean

The Current Biography of Artist,

ELLA FITZGERALD

Just say that one word, Ella. And the whole world knows who you mean. Ella Fitzgerald.

Some say she's the best pop singer around. Some say she's just the best jazz singer in the world. Whatever the case, Ella Fitzgerald reigns supreme as one of the legendary vocalists of popular song in the 20th Century.

Ella is one artist who does not rely solely on the success of the past. She believes in keeping up to date with what's happening in the music world. To prove it, Ella is constantly researching and learning new material. Ella's explanation, "Music always goes through trends like everything else, a singer has to keep that in mind. For a while, the jazz scene was so big, then the Bossa Nova hit, then came an upswing in Country and Western, followed by rock type tunes, now it's a combination of country and rock that's on top. What follows is anybody's guess."

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Ella finds to be truly effective, and keep her audience happy, she has to put together a song set that will include the old, and the contemporary alike, or in Ella's own language, "The proven standards, and the newer numbers." Based on this philosophy, a typical Ella show of today will encompass songs from a wide variety of musical eras, and styles---A Motown treatment of Smokey Robinson's "Get Ready", a few floating love ballads like Gershwin's "Isn't It A Pity", or "But Not For Me", the nostalgic "I'm Going To Sit Right Down, And Write Myself A Letter", followed by a gutsy Blues number like "Black Coffee", Bacharach's "This Girl's In Love With You", scat singing learned in her earlier days applied in a wordless tour de force to Dizzy Gillespie's "Manteca" (a recent arrangement by Gerald Wilson), the Beatles' "Something", and Ellington's "Satin Doll". Ella closes with "Put A Little Love In Your Heart"---moving through the audience, shaking hands---in her gesture of love.

The one point that stands out about the flexibility of an Ella song set is that Ella's flawless musicianship provides that no matter what song from what era she sings, she has that rare innate quality of giving it her treatment. "Ella does her own thing", and that's how audiences want it.

What are the qualities that strictly identify an Ella song rendition? There's her sincerity. At the moment she is singing a song, it's the only song in the world. The way Ella shapes and molds a song stands out. Lyrics interest her mostly. Ella explains her feelings, "The tunes I prefer are those that have a story line. The lyrics mean so much. They bring back memories to people. One tune that I love is, "A House Is Not A Home". I like it when lyrics and melody blend so smoothly---like they were meant for each other."

What adds to the technical side of Ella is that her phrasing, according to leading musicologists, is impeccable---not to mention the

extent and flexibility of her octave range. It is a wonder that with all her style and knowledge of music patterns, Ella has really never studied formally. She is a good example of the theory that exceptional talent is inborn.

Ella is also one of the very few exponents of the intricate singing form known as "Scat", developed during her earliest days as a band singer. Scat is a real marvel in rhythm and note patterns. Famous Ella "down pat" scat renditions include "How High The Moon", "Oh Lady Be Good", "It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing", and "Se Danse Samba".

Fellow members of the music profession continually compliment Ella. She is often referred to in the trade as "the singer's singer". (a quote started by Bing Crosby) Frank de Vol talks about Ella, "Ella Fitzgerald---is as great a vocalist as it's possible to find. She has a perfect voice mechanism, perfect intonation, perfect taste. As if that weren't enough, she's one of the most cooperative and agreeable artists to work with; she reads music well, and her ear is so sensitive that she can pick out a wrong note in the orchestra before I've spotted it myself." Henry Mancini tells it this way, "Ella's voice is always true. I wouldn't mind conducting a whole orchestra of Ella Fitzgeralds." Arranger Nelson Riddle puts it another way, "Ella is pure musician. She could mispronounce the words, and it still would be marvelous to listen to." Critic Leonard Feather put it eloquently, "Ella can do anything to a melody except damage."

Ella is actively involved in all the performing arts but singing "live" before an audience is her number one preference. In Ella's own words, "I get the emotional lift I need from working in front of people." This probably accounts for the fact that a good portion of Ella's working year happens on the road. Ella, on the average is on tour almost ten months out of the year. It is a reasonable estimate that she, and her entourage (road manager, personal maid, and trio of musicians)

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travel over 300,000 miles each year.

Whether Ella is accompanied by a full symphonic orchestra like the Philadelphia Chamber Symphony, or the New York Symphony, Chicago Symphony, the Moxie Whitney Band at the Royal York Hotel (Toronto), or Ernie Heckscher's Band at the Fairmont Hotel (San Francisco), she always tours with her own rhythm section: piano, bass, and drums. To be a member of Ella's hand-picked trio, you have to be recognized as the best in the business. Piano-wise, Ella has been accompanied by Jimmy Jones, Lou Levy, Hank Jones, Paul Smith, among others, and at the present time, Ella's pianist is Tommy Flanagan. He and Ella have been associated on and off for the past decade. Ed Thigpen, formerly of the Oscar Peterson Trio, now plays drums for Ella. Other masters of the "skins" who have done their thing for Ella include Gus Johnson, and Jo Jones. Bassist Frank De La Rosa is celebrating his fourth season on the road playing the pure unadulturated bass for Ella; Ray Brown, Joe Comfort, and Keeter Betts are some of the award-winning bass players who have backed Ella at one time or other.

Ella finds she can always manage to improvise with any professional orchestra as long as she is supported by her trio. This gives Ella the perfect framing she needs rhythm-wise to really color a composition. "My boys are a team with me," comments Ella.

Ella's concert tours encircle the earth. One of her favorite singing spots is culturally conscious Europe. Jazz artists are treated royally in Europe. Currently, in the States, jazz has been somewhat quashed by the hot country and rock groups. Ella, as an artist, has not been affected in any way by musical trends in the States for she is considered a musical institution rather than a fancy for the jazz purist alone.

A concert by Ella in Europe is looked forward to by jazz buff and popular song aficionado alike. A good example of a typical Ella tour through Europe is like this year's itinerary: Berlin, Cologne, Hamburg,

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Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Bonn, Dusseldorf (Germany), Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Lausanne (Switzerland), Paris, Dunkerque (France), Tilburg (Holland), Stockholm (Sweden), Budapest (Hungary), Belgrade (Yugoslavia), Bologna, Torino, Milano, Roma, Venice (Italy), Vienna (Austria), London, Leicester, and Brighton (England). In many European cities, Ella is joined on tour by the likes of the Count Basie Orchestra, or Duke Ellington.

Ella feels her native tongue is not really a barrier in foreign speaking countries. "The Europeans or South Americans come to hear me sing the songs I have recorded in English. Actually, they prefer that I sing in my native tongue. It's really not the language that is important to them but rather the feeling."

Ella has sung in many performing arts centers throughout the world---Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall (New York City), Lewisohn Stadium (New York), Constitution Hall, Carter Barron Amphitheatre (Washington, D.C.), Waikiki Shell (Honolulu), Festival Hall/Albert Hall (London), the huge Deutschlandhaller (Berlin), Greek Theatre/Hollywood Bowl/Santa Monica Civic/Pasadena Civic (Los Angeles), Cobo Hall (Detroit), Massey Hall (Toronto), Kiel Auditorium (St. Louis) among others. Audiences in these massive theatres range from 3500 to 20,000 on the average.

It is only with the nightclub situation that Ella can get intimate with an audience (300 to 800). Ella admits she enjoys the personal rapport of it all. The Now Grove (Los Angeles), Flamingo Hotel (Las Vegas), Waldorf Astoria (New York City), Royal York (Toronto), the Cave (Vancouver), Sherman House (Chicago), Roosevelt Hotel (New Orleans), Fairmont (San Francisco), are some of the beautiful places where Ella has sung.

One of Ella's favorite night spots in the world is located in the famous Tivoli Gardens (Copenhagen). Ella reflects, "We stayed for a month---it was summer in Copenhagen. We kept running into American tourists. We sang in a big park, and it was surprising how people loved, and appreciated the music. They really respect American artists over

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there."

The States, and Europe are Ella's main singing grounds. However, she does perform from time to time in locales like Australia, Japan, Hawaii, New Zealand, and Mexico. This year, a tour through South America has been set that includes Buenos Aires, Porto Alegre, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Caracas.

Recordings have always proven to be the backbone of communication for the performer. It is a vital exposure for any artist. Ever since Ella began singing professionally in her early teens with the Chick Webb Band, she has experience singing before a recording mike.

Ella's big all-time hit single came out of the Chick Webb days. This was a two million seller, a catchy ditty that caught on called, "A Tisket - A Tasket". Ella who helped compose "Tisket" is still an active member of ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers). Her most recent composition was written in memory of Martin Luther King, "It's Up To You And To Me". (A Capitol recording, Ella donates all the royalties from the tune to the Martin Luther King Foundation)

Over the years Ella has put down on record over 100 albums---enough music to be categorized in a directory. Some of the all-time hits include: "Mack the Knife", "Mr. Paganini", "But Not For Me", and "Can't Buy Me Love", to name a few.

Ella's newest album on the Reprise label is called, "Things Ain't What They Used To Be"---and she sings, "Sunny", "Mas Que Nada", "A Man And A Woman", "Days Of Wine And Roses", "Black Coffee", "Tuxedo Junction", "I Heard It Through The Grapevine", "Don't Dream Of Anybody But Me", "Things Ain't What They Used To Be", "Willow Weep For Me", "Manteca", and "Just When We're Falling In Love". There's a selection for everyone to identify with. (the same thought behind her in person show)

The volumes of albums that Ella recorded which stand out as pure masterpieces are her songbooks. "The Cole Porter Songbook" which features

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such Porter classics as "Miss Otis Regrets", "Get Out Of Town", and "It's Alright With Me", is an all-time favorite Grammy winner. (Just one of her Grammy winning albums) The other Songbooks feature the works of Johnny Mercer, Harold Arlen, Irving Berlin, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, Duke Ellington, and the five volume George and Ira Gershwin Songbooks, etc. They may not get the airplay they commanded when they were first released, but these recordings did much to establish the worth that Ella now enjoys internationally. The Songbooks are not just mode of the day pieces, rather they are important contributions to the archives of popular music.

The idea of the Songbooks was first conceived by Ella's long-standing Personal Manager, Norman Granz, who first hit international prominence as the originator of the "Jazz at the Philharmonic" tours. These famous concerts which originated in the early Forties did more to elevate the stature of the jazz artist than any other presentation.

How does Norman Granz feel about Ella? He tells it like this, "Ella is the compleat singer. I admit, I'm completely biased---I feel she still is the most important singer on the scene today. On my first JATP tour, I used to think that the late and great Billie Holiday was the best of the lady jazz singers; she always headlined my early Forties concerts but by the early Fifties, I was completely Ella orientated."

Ella is a mature artist who knows her craft backwards and forwards. She is a very dedicated craftsman in every sense of the word. Experience has been a grand teacher for her. You're more than aware when this lady sings that she has spent a great deal of her life warbling under every condition, and before every type of audience imaginable. She is a super star who is seasoned to perfection.

Ella's Americana beginnings (self-made in nature) have been re-hashed over and over by many a musical historian but here are just the important highlights: she was born in the state of Virginia (Newport News) but

spent most of her growing years in Yonkers, New York with her real mother and step-father, who raised her as a tot. Ella's idea of fun in those days was her hobby--singing and dancing; or sneaking off during lunch hour at junior high to watch singer Dolly Dawn do her thing at the local theatre. Ella was an avid fan of the then popular Boswell Sisters, one of whom she idolized, Connee Boswell, who was to become her most decisive vocal influence. As strange as it seems, Ella in the early years preferred dancing to singing: "Everyone around Yonkers thought that young, skinny me could really do a 'mean' step," she recalls.

During the middle Thirties, the Amateur Hour Contest held regularly in local theatres around New York City was really popular. Not only did it serve as a showcase for new aspiring talent but the general public really supported the AHC. The Amateur Hour was certainly in its hey day. It was as a contestant at these amateur shows that Ella gained recognition as a teen age girl singer. It was on a dare that Ella turned to singing. "I sang because all the dance slots were filled at the very first amateur contest, I entered at the Harlem Opera House. I couldn't believe it when I won first prize of ten dollars for my singing efforts," Ella reminisces. She liked the feeling of singing before an audience. "I knew they liked me by the way they clapped their hands when I finished singing."

It was not long before Ella started to gain a name as the "young gal who won all those contests". Many knowledgeable musicians were overawed by the natural musicianship of Ella. Meanwhile, Ella was relying a lot on Connee Boswell's renditions for support. She had three Connee Boswell favorites in her repetoire; "Judy", "The Object Of My Affection", and "Believe It Beloved". The audience ate it up.

Ella's first professional engagement, after all the amateur contests, was the Harlem Opera House at fifty dollars a week. Tiny Bradshaw's Band was in the show. It was jovial Tiny who introduced Ella to the virtuoso drummer Chick Webb who was really riding high on the crest of success in

those days. Ella bashfully auditioned for Chick in his dressing room doing her favorite Conne Boswell number. Chick actually didn't want to take a young girl on the road but it so happened he needed a singer in a hurry. The next evening, Ella was before the mike with the Chick Webb Band at Yale University. When Chick saw Ella's marvelous rapport with an audience, he decided then and there to hire her on a permanent basis. Ella recalls, "The following week we opened at the Savoy, and I guess you know the rest."

The Webb Band, and the Savoy days were a great training ground for a young singer. There are hardly any vocalists today who get the opportunity to work out with a big band. Ella reminisces about her good fortune, "After closing the Savoy, we used to play dance halls up and down the East Coast. I can remember singing a set with Chick's band---being underage I always had to stand outside between sets because beer was sold. Sometimes, it got cold but I didn't mind it."

There was a pause in the steady upward graph of Ella's career caused by the untimely passing of Webb in 1939. Webb, a slight hunchback, did not possess good health, and it finally caught up with him. Chick, had, in the meantime, become Ella's guardian and mentor. Ella, in fact, was so loyal to the memory of Webb that she decided not to disband the Orchestra. Instead, Ella herself took over the baton. Ella led the band, and sang right up to the start of World War II. The war, however, stopped most peace-time activities, and the Chick Webb Band with Ella Fitzgerald was one of them.

It was after the war that Ella began her productive relationship with Norman Granz. It was through one of his earlier JATP tours that they first met. She joined his JATP troupe as a regular in 1949. Five years later (1954), Norman Granz took control as Ella's Personal Manager, a relationship that has only grown stronger through the years.

Ella likes the medium of television. "Just one guest spot, and you're singing to millions. You sing to all those people who live in areas you

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just don't get the time to play." When the opportunity presents itself, Ella would like to have her own television series. Ella explains, "I'll sing, and invite special guests on the show." She did a Screen Gems Special a few years back, that was divided into three parts: Ella at home, Ella with Duke Ellington, and Ella singing backed up by her Trio. The critics called this Ella Special, "a masterpiece on video tape". It's still a favorite replay on TV.

When her schedule allows, Ella likes to guest on major TV shows such as, Ed Sullivan, Carol Burnett, Kraft Music Hall, Flip Wilson Show, Andy Williams, Dean Martin, Glen Campbell, Tom Jones Xmas Special, and the Pearl Bailey Show. Pearlie Mae commented to Ella when she appeared recently on her show, "I've waited a long time to have you on, sweetheart--but Ella, baby it was well worth the stay." Ella's appearance on a Frank Sinatra Special a few years back is still remembered as one of the truly classic presentations. So far, it has been replayed three times on national television.

The familiar appellation "First Lady Of Song" or, as Ella is affectionately known in Europe, "La Bella Ella", has become somewhat redundant. Adjectives are rather commonplace in describing her performance. Her marvelous newspaper reviews attest to this.

Ella has won more awards for singing excellence than any other vocalist of this Century. Several rooms of her 12 room estate (Beverly Hills, California) are ringed with trophies, and plaques, and citations of every size and description. "The Pied Piper", a signed metal sculpture presented to her by ASCAP is one of her favorites. Ella's letter from Mrs. Martin Luther King thanking her for the original composition, "It's Up To You, And To Me" is very close to her heart. The numerous Grammys she has been honored with give her satisfaction (The recording industry's "Oscar"). And would you believe---for the 18th year in a row, Ella just received the Best Female Singer Award from Downbeat Magazine. Playboy

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Magazine made it the 13th year in succession when they announced Ella was the winner in their #1 Female Vocalist Category. Other honors include the loving cup she received a few years back as Woman of the Year from the Los Angeles Times, and the achievement award "100 Most Accomplished Women" (presented by Harper's Bazaar Magazine). Ella is also the recipient of the Bambi Award---Germany's highest presentation for TV excellence. The Golden Needle Award is the highest honor ever presented to an artist by the East Berlin government; this is another of Ella's memorabilia.

When Ella is not performing she can always be found in her favorite spot in the world--home sweet home. Actually, Ella is a simple homebody, and if it weren't for her dedication to her singing craft, Ella would spend her time gardening, cooking, sewing, and caring for her family. Her brood consists of her only son, Ray Brown, Jr., the offspring of her marriage to the renowned bass player, Ray Brown. Then there are her nieces, Karen and Eloise---and her adorable little two and a half year old grand niece Valerie. Her close knit family makes it all worth while as far as Ella is concerned.

Whenever there is an opportune moment, Ella's family joins her on the road. When Ella played a whole month's singing engagement in Copenhagen, the kids were with her---the same happened when she played the Flamingo Hotel. Recently while playing the Fairmont Hotel, her little niece Valerie joined her. "When my family is with me it makes my days as important as my nights," confides Ella.

Ella, as gathered from the facts expressed in this now biography, is rather a rare personage in these fast and furious days. Somehow, Ella the woman, and Ella the artist, always rises above it all. May she continue to bring her sparkle into this tired old world.

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Audrey P. Franklyn
June 1, 1971